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ABSTRACT

Recent psychological research in motivation has resulted in several goal orientation theories that have important implications for improving learning and instruction, especially for musical performance groups. Goal theory proposes that there are two general goal orientations students can adopt: a task-focused orientation with an intrinsic focus on learning and improving; and an ability-focused orientation with an extrinsic focus on getting good grades or rewards, doing better than others, or receiving public recognition. By their very nature, musical performing groups invite the development of ability-focused goals. Students are encouraged to strive for the "best" performance, which is often publicly recognized. Many of the competitive aspects of performing groups, however, cannot be eliminated. The aim then becomes how to balance the ability-focused orientation inherent in performance groups with a task-focused orientation that seems to produce stronger motivational and cognitive outcomes. To create a task-focused environment that will promote students' musical growth and maintain quality performance levels, the director should focus on meaningful tasks that emphasize musical literacy, recognize effort and developing skills rather than aptitude or prior musical accomplishments, make evaluations private rather than public, encourage self evaluation, provide opportunities for improvement, and create environments that allow for developing student autonomy and responsibility. (Contains 13 endnotes.) (BT)

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# Goals, Motivation, and Performance.

by Richard L. Mallonee

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## Goals, Motivation, and Performance

*The band, orchestra, and choir directors of a suburban high school are talking:*

*Band director:* *All I've heard today is how the band wants to beat Edgewood at the marching band competition this weekend.*

*Orchestra director:* *My students always want to compete for first chair; and when they challenge and fail, they give up and quit trying.*

*Choir director:* *And my students only want to go to contest to get the rating and the prestige. I can't seem to get them to see contest as a learning experience.*

*Band director:* *I wonder what we can do to get our students to realize the need to work hard for themselves, to set a goal and challenge themselves to reach it for their own musical growth, not to look better than everyone else? I don't want to destroy the idea of teamwork that they have developed, but it seems that being #1 is more important than personal achievement.*

These teachers are concerned about what motivates their students--what energizes their behavior. They are concerned about the goals their students are setting for themselves and what they, as music instructors, can do to encourage intrinsic motivation and musical development. Motivating students to do their best and to reach their highest potential is important to all music teachers, whether they teach individual students in the studio or direct

large performing groups. Fortunately, recent psychological research in motivation has resulted in several goal orientation theories that have important implications for improving learning and instruction, especially for musical performance groups.

## GOAL THEORY

Goal theory proposes that there are two general goal orientations students can adopt: a task-focused orientation with an intrinsic focus on learning and improving; and an ability-focused orientation with an extrinsic focus on getting good grades or rewards, doing better than others, or receiving public recognition.[1] Task-focused versus ability-focused goal orientation is similar to the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; however, goal theory deals with cognitive processes that can vary depending on the context. This makes it specifically applicable to classroom and studio situations.[2]

Students who adopt task-focused goals are interested in learning, developing new skills, trying to accomplish something challenging, and gaining understanding or insight. Students are more likely to see a strong link between their effort and the outcome ("If I try hard, I can do this") which, in turn, will help them work harder, and ultimately do better.[3] A mastery goal seeks to increase competence.

Students who adopt ability-focused goals center on how their ability will be publicly judged and seem to attribute their success or failure to their level of ability. ("If I have to practice more than others to learn my music, I must not be as good as they are.") This leads

them either to strive to be the best,[4] or to avoid effort all together in order to protect their ability and self-worth.[5] An ability-focused goal requires a positive evaluation of competence.

## GOAL THEORY AND MUSICAL PERFORMING GROUPS

By their very nature, musical performing groups invite the development of ability-focused goals. Students are encouraged to strive for the "best" performance, which is often publicly recognized. Some students see themselves as having more or less musical talent than others, leading to ability, rather than effort, attributions for success or failure. Competitions, contests, and auditions can promote social comparisons and encourage ability attributions.

Nevertheless, many of the competitive aspects of performing groups cannot, and should not, be eliminated. The aim then becomes how to balance the ability-focused orientation inherent in performance groups with a task-focused orientation that seems to produce stronger motivational and cognitive outcomes.

It appears that the goal orientation stressed in the classroom influences the goal structure adopted by the students. If this is true, how can directors create a task-focused environment within performance groups that will promote students' musical growth and still maintain quality performance levels? Ames suggests that teachers create task-focused goal environments 1) by the ways in which they select and deliver tasks, 2) by whom and what they recognize, 3) by the evaluation strategies they emphasize and, 4) by how they exercise authority and encourage autonomy.[6]

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PERFORMANCE GROUPS

1.) Focus on meaningful *tasks* that emphasize musical literacy. The performance group is often the only musical experience available to students, especially in secondary schools. It is essential, therefore, to promote musical literacy skills for all students regardless of individual ability, and to structure rehearsal environments to encourage task-focused goals. Two ways to accomplish this are by the use of effective rehearsal techniques and through strategy acquisition.

Rehearsals which include a balance of varied musical activities and intensity levels seem to improve student attention to task.[7] Select diverse, varied, repertoire that challenges students' musical growth but does not frustrate or discourage them. Maintain fast-paced rehearsals that keep students actively engaged. Build students' technical skills by reducing the "technique mystique" and explaining and demonstrating the elements of proficient playing.[8]

In addition to traditional music reading skills, independence and competence can be fostered by helping students develop a repertoire of musical strategies to help improve skills, as well as demonstrating how a particular strategy can be effectively applied.[9] Music teachers' admonitions to "keep trying" and "work hard" frequently do not result in improved knowledge and skills because the strategies needed for success are not clear to students.[10] When a musical or technical problem arises in a rehearsal, model effective strategies by "thinking aloud" the processes required to correct the problem. This "think aloud" procedure makes the process more apparent to students and aids in their own strategy development. For example, when intonation problems occur, the possible causes should be isolated–lack of rhythmic precision,

hand position, embouchure, concentration–strategies for treatment suggested, and technical skills applied to correct the problem.

Instruction that emphasizes meaningful, musical literacy tasks, technical skill development, and strategy practice are effective methods for enhancing a task-focused orientation. These strategies, however, will be inadequate if the orientation of the classroom remains competitive and ability dominated.

2.) *Recognize* effort and developing skills rather than aptitude or prior musical accomplishments. Students in performing groups reflect all levels of musical ability, and each needs to be nurtured and developed. Emphasizing ability by such means as public auditions and testing, or chairs and positions chosen by competition may reinforce the notion that some have greater musical ability than others, undermining the motivation of struggling students. When competitive structures are used, balance them with systems for recognizing individual effort and improvement, and by stressing that musical ability and skills can be continuously improved through instruction and practice.[11]

When music reading and skill development are emphasized, a foundation is created for students to set individual goals for their own improvement and to monitor their progress toward those goals. Success is greater when students feel the instructor helps them acquire individual objectives for improvement and when they can work on personal as well as group goals.[12] In the rehearsal process, model for students how to set goals that are specific, short term, and attainable with a reasonable amount of effort. Have students keep a weekly goal sheet or journal and regularly evaluate their progress to help them trace their own musical growth and to reinforce the idea that ability can be developed. Success at recognizing

progress, however, requires that students gain the ability to evaluate their efforts toward both individual and group goals.

3.) Make *evaluations* private rather than public, encourage self-evaluation skills, and provide opportunities for improvement. Evaluation procedures have important implications for student motivation. An ability-focused environment that emphasizes grades, public evaluation, and social comparison leads students to become more focused on their ability in comparison to others rather than on working with others to achieve group goals. This danger to motivation is reduced, however, if evaluations are conducted privately, based on individual effort and progress, and accompanied by an opportunity to improve.[13] Task-focused goals can also be maintained in competitive situations by focusing on self as a group–doing our best; learning what we can do to improve; doing better than we did last time.

If the development of individual goals is to have an impact on motivation, students must also learn how to self-evaluate their progress toward those goals. Having students assess their progress gives them confidence in their increasing competence, and this perception strengthens self-efficacy and keeps students working productively.[14] If opportunities for improvement are offered and evaluation is tied to progress and feedback about quality, mistakes can be framed as opportunities for learning and errors treated as a way to learn and improve.

When students have developed the ability to self-evaluate their progress and the progress of the group, they can utilize these skills to increase their decision making opportunities within the group.

4.) Create environments that allow for developing student *autonomy* and responsibility. Autonomy and responsibility can be promoted by involving students in authentic decision

making. Many performing groups already have outstanding student leadership programs that utilize section leaders and student advisory boards. The challenge, however, is to provide opportunities for all students to develop leadership and responsibility. Student evaluation skills are enhanced when students are allowed to evaluate the rehearsal, determine strengths and weaknesses, and suggest strategies for improvement. Student involvement in decision making encourages a cooperative attitude of working together toward common goals.

A successful way to allow for choice and to develop responsibility is to encourage student participation in small group ensembles, not for competitive purposes, but to promote individual musical growth and group decision making. Ensembles choose their own music, select goals for their work, and establish criteria to evaluate progress. Students in ensembles must deal with musical aspects of performance which are often determined and controlled only by the director. As they struggle with issues of technique, dynamics, blend, balance, intonation, and expression, they will truly think like musicians and expand their musical literacy.

What results might be anticipated if task-focused goals are stressed in the performance group? Students expend effort to fulfill group commitments and to achieve group goals rather than to compete against each other; peers are seen as sources of information and co-participants rather than as a threat to one's self-esteem; feelings of belongingness and social responsibility add impetus for effort; the focus is on effort and learning and intrinsic interest is high; students develop musical skills, critical thinking, and decision making skills that will benefit them in all areas of their lives.

When the three directors at the beginning of this paper incorporate task-focused goals into their programs, their conversation is likely to sound very different:

*Band director:* *My students are excited about the marching band competition tomorrow. They have been working really hard to improve the program, and they keep coming up with ways to make it better.*

*Orchestra director:* *You know, since I eliminated the competition for chairs and rotated positions, my kids are working harder. They don't give up when things get difficult, and they're willing to help each other out rather than competing against each other.*

*Choir director:* *My students told me that the rating at contest wasn't as important to them as knowing they had worked hard at some challenging music. They just want to do their best.*

*Orchestra director:* *I really feel as if we're a team, all working toward the same goal. That's a great feeling!*

## Notes

[1] Goal orientation theories go by a variety of names: *learning and performance goals* (Dweck & Leggett, 1988); *task-involved and ego involved goals* (Nicholls, 1984); *mastery and performance goals* (Ames, 1992); and *task-focused and ability-focused goals* (Maehr & Midgley, 1991). Each theory differs somewhat in its definition of terms and how the constructs are measured; however, there are sufficient similarities in the approaches to discuss goal orientation as a single theory. This paper uses the terms *task-focused and ability-focused goals*.

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[3] C. Ames, "Classrooms: Goals, Structures, and Student Motivation," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 84 (1992): 261-271.

[4] *Ibid*.

[5] M. V. Covington and C. L. Omelich, "Effort: The Double-Edged Sword in School Achievement," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71 (1979): 169-182.

[6] Ames, 267.

[7] A. C. Witt, "Use of Class Time and Student Attentiveness in Secondary Instrumental Rehearsals," *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 34 (1986): 34-42.

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[13] M. V. Covington and C. L. Omelich, Task-oriented Versus Competitive Learning Structures: Motivational and Performance Consequences," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76, (1984): 1038-1050.